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Family Physicians Urge End to Budget Stalemate

Patients' Health at Risk as Clinics Struggle Statewide

SAN FRANCISCO – August 3, 2007 – Family physicians, the bedrock of primary and preventive care statewide, are urging California lawmakers to pass a state budget and resume funding to community clinics immediately to prevent interruptions in essential patient care.

“Our first concern as family physicians is our patients’ health,” said Carla Kakutani, MD, president of the 7,000-member California Academy of Family Physicians (CAFP) and a practicing physician in Winters, near Sacramento. “Millions of patients are at risk today as community clinics and other providers face imminent crises ranging from temporarily closing their doors to going out of business because of the state budget impasse.”

When community clinics close their doors, patients lack access to primary and preventive care, including critical monitoring that helps patients avoid serious but entirely preventable complications from chronic diseases like diabetes and heart disease, she said. “Threatening community health because of political posturing endangers peoples’ lives – it’s unconscionable,” Kakutani said.

Patients with health matters best treated in community settings, where care can be provided sooner and more cost-effectively, will have to rely instead on hospital emergency rooms, stretching an already overburdened emergency system, she said. “This budget stalemate will cost the state many millions of dollars in added emergency services and compromised patient health outcomes,” Kakutani said, “as some patients seek expensive emergency room care and others delay seeking care until routine conditions become crises.”

Family physicians from around the state are reporting crises at their community clinics, she said. “We’ve heard today from CAFP members in Los Angeles, the Central Valley,

Santa Cruz, San Francisco, Santa Rosa, Sacramento and other places that patient care is in serious jeopardy, and we must press our elected officials to solve this crisis now.”

About the California Academy of Family Physicians

Since 1948, CAFP has been analyzing and disseminating trends and information to assist California’s family physicians in their practices. With more than 7,000 members, including active practicing family physicians, residents in family medicine, and medical students interested in the specialty, CAFP is the largest primary care medical society in California, and the largest chapter of the American Academy of Family Physicians. Family physicians are trained to treat an entire family’s medical needs, addressing the whole spectrum of life’s medical challenges. FPs serve a broad base of patients in urban, suburban and rural areas, often in California’s most underserved areas.